



Billing Code 4310-55

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

[FWS-R5-R-2011-N218]

[BAC-4311-K9-S3]

Plum Tree Island National Wildlife Refuge, Poquoson, VA

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare a comprehensive conservation plan and environmental assessment; request for comments.

SUMMARY: We, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), intend to prepare a comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) and environmental assessment (EA) for Plum Tree Island National Wildlife Refuge (the refuge, NWR), which is located in Poquoson, Virginia. We provide this notice in compliance with our CCP policy to advise other Federal and State agencies, Tribes, and the public of our intention to conduct detailed planning on this refuge.

DATES: We will announce opportunities for public input throughout the CCP process in the *Federal Register*, local news media, and on our refuge planning Web site at http://www.fws.gov/northeast/plumtreeisland/refuge_planning.html.

ADDRESSES: Send your comments or requests for more information by any of the following methods.

E-mail: fw5rw_evrnwr@fws.gov. Include “Plum Tree Island CCP” in the subject line of the message.

Fax: Attn: Meghan Carfioli, 804-829-9606.

U.S. Mail: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Eastern Virginia Rivers National Wildlife Refuge Complex – Charles City Sub-Office, 11116 Kimages Road, Charles City, VA 23030.

In-Person Drop-off: You may drop off comments during regular business hours at the address above.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Meghan Carfioli, Planning Team Leader, 804-829-5413 (phone) or Andy Hofmann, Project Leader, Eastern Virginia Rivers National Wildlife Refuge Complex, 804-333-1470 (phone), fw5rw_evrnwr@fws.gov (e-mail).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Introduction

With this notice, we initiate our process for developing a CCP for Plum Tree Island NWR, in the city of Poquoson, Virginia. This notice complies with our CCP policy to advise other Federal and State agencies, Tribes, and the public of our intention to conduct detailed planning on this refuge.

Background

The CCP Process

The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 668dd-668ee) (Administration Act), as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, requires us to develop a CCP for each national wildlife refuge. The purpose of developing a CCP is to provide refuge managers with a 15-year plan for achieving refuge purposes and contributing to the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS), consistent with sound principles of fish and wildlife conservation, legal mandates, and our policies. In addition to outlining broad management direction on conserving wildlife and their habitats, CCPs identify wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities available to the public, including opportunities for hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation. We will review and update the CCP at least every 15 years in accordance with the Administration Act.

Each unit of the NWRS was established for specific purposes. We use these purposes as the foundation for developing and prioritizing the management goals and

objectives for each refuge within the NWRS, and to determine how the public can use each refuge. The planning process is a way for us and the public to evaluate management goals and objectives that will ensure the best possible approach to wildlife, plant, and habitat conservation, while providing for wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities that are compatible with each refuge's establishing purposes and the mission of the NWRS.

Our CCP process provides participation opportunities for Federal, Tribal, State, and local governments, agencies, organizations, and the public. Throughout the process, we will have formal comment periods and hold public meetings to gather comments, issues, concerns, ideas, and suggestions for the future management of Plum Tree Island NWR. You may also send comments during the planning process by mail, e-mail, or fax (see **ADDRESSES**).

We will conduct the environmental review of this project and develop an EA in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA) (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.); NEPA regulations (40 CFR parts 1500–1508); other appropriate Federal laws and regulations; and our policies and procedures for compliance with those laws and regulations.

Plum Tree Island National Wildlife Refuge

Plum Tree Island NWR is one of four refuges that comprise the Eastern Virginia Rivers NWR Complex. The 3,502-acre refuge is located along the Atlantic Flyway in the city of Poquoson, Virginia. It was established in 1972 to conserve wetlands and important migratory bird habitat in the lower Chesapeake Bay. The refuge's salt marsh, scrub-shrub, and forest habitats support a variety of native wildlife species, including

waterfowl, marshbirds, and shorebirds. The refuge's beaches are also home to the federally threatened northeastern beach tiger beetle (*Cicindela dorsalis dorsalis*).

The U.S. Department of Defense previously administered the refuge lands and used all but the refuge's 200-acre Cow Island Tract as a gunnery and bombing range. Extensive unexploded ordnance remains on the refuge, posing serious safety concerns. Most of the refuge is closed to public access. The only public use offered is an annual, permit-only, waterfowl hunt on the Cow Island Tract.

Scoping: Preliminary Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities

We have identified several preliminary issues, concerns, and opportunities that we intend to address in the CCP. These include the following:

- Unexploded ordnance on the refuge and its implications for refuge management and public access;
- The potential for climate change to impact refuge resources;
- The potential for land acquisition and conservation easements within the existing, approved boundary;
- Opportunities to collaborate with partner organizations for off-refuge interpretation and education programming.

We expect that members of the public, our conservation partners and Federal, State, Tribal, and local governments may identify additional issues during public scoping.

Public Meetings

During the planning process, we will hold public meetings for individuals, organizations, and agencies to provide comments, issues, concerns, and suggestions about refuge management. When we schedule formal comment periods and public meeting(s), we will announce them in the *Federal Register*, local news media, and on our refuge planning website at http://www.fws.gov/northeast/plumtreeisland/refuge_planning.html.

You can also obtain the schedule from the planning team leader or project leader (see **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**).

Public Availability of Comments

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

_____	December 5, 2011_____
Salvatore M. Amato	Date
Acting Regional Director, Northeast Region	
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	
Hadley, Massachusetts 01035	